

A Comparison of
Christian Worship--A Lutheran
Hymnal

with

The Lutheran Hymnal

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"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" These are the words of David which are found in Psalm 122:1. In these words, David expressed his joy over the fact that he had the wonderful opportunity to go to the house of God and worship him. We have this same wonderful opportunity that David had, as we too can go to the house of God and worship him. In our worship services, we are reminded of God's love and the forgiveness which he gives us. We go to him in prayer and ask for his blessing upon our week. We give him our praise and thanks for all that he has done for us!

For over 50 years (1941-1993), we in the WELS worshiped our God by using The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH), which was authorized by the synods constituting *The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America*. It was published by Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis in 1941. TLH was an excellent worship tool and served our worship needs quite well. There were those who felt that TLH could continue to satisfy our worship needs for many years to come. In the early 80's, when there was talk of the WELS producing a new hymnal, some were wondering: "Why do we need a new hymnal? What is wrong with the one we ^{have} got?" Pastor Kurt Eggert, who served as chairman of the Joint Hymnal Committee (JHC) from 1984 until his death in 1993, in responding to these questions, also admitted: "First of all, it should be said that TLH is generally a fine resource for worship. It is faithful to God's Word and Lutheran theology...It might seem then, that with 660 hymns and 168 pages of liturgical materials, it could serve us well for another 40 years or longer" {End Note (EN) #1}.

So why the need for a new hymnal then? Well, Pastor Eggert in the same article, also pointed out the weaknesses of TLH. These weaknesses were significant enough that they warranted the production of a new hymnal. The following are the weaknesses of TLH which Pastor Eggert noted:

- 1) Language needs updating.

- 2) A number of liturgies and other forms from our heritage should be incorporated.
- 3) Pitches in chants and hymns should be lowered.
- 4) Propers (introits, collects, graduals) should be replaced/revised.
- 5) Hymn balance within the church year and other topical selections should be improved.
- 6) Room should be made for the use of Psalms in the Sunday service.
- 7) Many excellent hymns not in TLH should be made available for worship (EN #2).

Weaknesses of TLH were also recognized at the 1981 Synod Convention. Because of these weaknesses, it was decided that it was time to recognize the need for a new hymnal:

Whereas 1) in TLH there are some imbalances in the number of hymns allotted to the various festivals and seasons of the church year and shortages of hymns in other topical sections like Baptism, Christian Education, Evangelism, Christian Love and Concern, etc; and

Whereas 2) there are many worthy and singable hymns, old and new, from our own distinctive Lutheran heritage as well as from the wider Christian heritage which might be included in our hymnal; and

Whereas 3) our hymnal could be improved through the use of such things as: a) contemporary language b) new, understandable propers c) musical settings for psalms and canticles d) an expanded prayer section e) better music for the chants;

Therefore, be it Resolved that the Synod at this time recognize that there is a growing need for a new Hymnal within the next decade (EN #3).

After two years of studying the issue, it was decided at the 1983 convention that the WELS begin work on the publication of a "new/revised" hymnal:

Whereas 3) The Commission on Worship is recommending "that WELS at this time begin the preparation of its own new/revised hymnal that will reflect the worship traditions and roots of our Synod and will seek to meet the present and future worship needs of our congregations;"

Therefore, be it Resolved, c) That the synod now begin work on a new/revised hymnal of its own, one that under the blessings of God will be Scripturally sound and edifying, welcomed and judged to be highly satisfactory for purposes of devotion and worship by a majority of our members, in harmony with the character and heritage of our

church body, and will reflect the larger perspective and mainstream of the worship of the Christian Church (EN #4).

Thus, it was decided that the WELS would produce a new Hymnal. A committee was formed, and ten years later, at the 1993 convention, Christian Worship-A Lutheran Hymnal (CW) was introduced, accepted, and commended for use:

Whereas 1) this convention marks the formal introduction of the new hymnal, Christian Worship-A Lutheran Hymnal; and

Whereas 3) the attractive new hymnal has been printed and made available to our constituency by Northwestern Publishing House;

Therefore, be it resolved, c) that we commend this hymnal to our membership for use in our private and public worship life with the prayer that it may be used profitably for many years to build up the church spiritually and to glorify our Lord (EN #5).

In comparing CW with TLH, it is my opinion that CW is a great improvement upon TLH. I would like to focus on three areas in which CW improved upon the weaknesses of TLH. The three areas are: 1) Updating the language 2) Improving the hymns 3) Improving the liturgy.

Updating the language was one of the main reasons for the production of a new hymnal. In a survey taken at the 1982 district conventions, 77% of the delegates agreed that the language of the hymnal should be updated (EN #6). There was the need for change from the Elizabethan English of the KJV to modern English spoken today. In our speech today, we no longer use words like: thee, thou, wilt, didst, madest, doth, passeth, endureth, thence, sittith, quick(ening), etc. Pastor Rolfe Westendorf also made these remarks about using the old English: "We were familiar with those old words that aren't being used anymore, but our children weren't. Until this year, I had to take precious time from catechism class to teach a list of 37 unfamiliar words...and the last time I gave a test on those words, 7 of 16 flunked it." Pastor Westendorf also mentioned that updating the language will also make visitors feel more comfortable. He pointed out that visitors should not need a pocket dictionary

to understand the words that are used when they come to worship with us (EN #7).

Updating the language was an essential need. Using contemporary English in CW makes things a lot easier, as you don't have to take so much time to explain to visitors and children what the old KJV language means. Pastor Victor Prange, who was a member of the JHC, also said:

Our goal must be to use the best possible contemporary English. It must be language well-crafted and expressive, yet readily understandable; there needs to be rhythm and balance; worship requires language which is vibrant, not drab and dull. The words we sing and speak in worship glorify the Lord of heaven and earth; they proclaim his saving gospel to people he loves. The language of worship needs to be the very best we can bring forth (EN #8).

It is my opinion that the JHC did a great job of updating the language from the old English of TLH to the English spoken today. When one looks at the hymns, liturgy, and prayers found in CW, it is quite easy to see that the language used is contemporary English and a great improvement upon TLH. It is the language of today. It is language that children and visitors can understand.

Modernizing the language was not the only issue the JHC had to deal with in updating the language. There were two other issues the JHC had to deal with. First of all, there was the sensitivity to sexism/racism. The JHC sought to avoid expressions that were racially and sexually exclusive. For example, the last line of the hymn "Today thy Mercy Calls Us," was changed from: "Thy precious blood can cleanse us and make us **white** today," (TLH, Hymn 279) to "Your precious blood can wash us, and make us clean today" (CW, Hymn 339). Another example is found in the hymn: "Not all the Blood of Beasts." The second line of the first verse was changed from: "On Jewish alters slain," (TLH, Hymn 156) to "On Israel's alters slain" (CW, Hymn 128). I think the JHC was very wise to be sensitive to these issues and to make these necessary changes.

Another issue the JHC had to study in updating the language was whether to

use inclusive or exclusive language. Could "man" be used in a generic sense to include all humans (specifically women and children)? Or was it to be used in a narrow sense, namely to refer just to men, as in the male gender? The JHC wrestled with this question and it was finally decided that the generic use of man had become a thing of the past. Thus whenever possible, the JHC chose to change "man/men" to "people/human/men, women, and children."

In the Nicene Creed the change was made from: "and was made man" to "and became fully human." Some felt that by making this change, the JHC was giving in to the feminist movement. But Pastor Prange explains that this change was made because the word "man" is not used anymore in its generic sense, namely to denote: "a human being, a person." Rather "man" is used today in a more specific sense, namely to refer to males. To quote Pastor Prange: "As a result of this language change the JHC has chosen to use the translation 'fully human' in the Nicene Creed when speaking of Jesus rather than using the word 'man.' This is not to deny that Jesus was male. But the creed is not making the point that Jesus was male. The creed means to say that just as Jesus is fully divine, so also is he fully human" (EN #9).

I do agree with the JHC's reasoning that the generic use of man has become a thing of the past and that it was wise for them to use inclusive language. I also think Pastor Prange explained quite well, why the change in the Nicene Creed was made from "and was made man" to "and became fully human." I do agree with the reasoning of the JHC and with their decision to use "and became fully human."

Not only was updating the language a primary reason for the production of a new hymnal, the desire to improve upon the hymns in TLH was another major reason for the production of a new hymnal. There were two main areas in which the hymns of TLH could be improved upon. One area was hymn balance. The second area was deciding which hymns should be included in the new hymnal.

There was the desire to improve the hymn balance within the church year. In the survey taken at the 1982 district conventions, 77% of the pastor's felt that the choice of hymns in TLH was too limited for some seasons in the church year or for some occasions (EN #10). Pastor Eggert also states: "The hymn balance within the church year and other topical sections should be improved. We have for example 16 hymns for New Year (a one day/year event), but only nine for the whole Epiphany season (which lasts several weeks)" (EN #11).

Pastor Harlyn Kuschel, a member of the JHC, also observed some weaknesses regarding the hymn balance found in TLH and noted several changes that are found in CW:

TLH contains 12 hymns for Ascension, a festival that occurs only on a single day each year...The "Death and Burial" section of the new hymnal will be greatly reduced, reflecting the fact that hymns in other sections of the new hymnal ("Justification" "Redeemer" "Trust") are also very much in place for congregational singing at funerals...and hymns for certain "once-in-a-lifetime" occasions--dedication, cornerstone laying--were dropped with the understanding that if special hymns were desired for such occasions, they can easily be printed in a service folder for the day (EN #12).

When comparing the hymn balance found in TLH with the hymn balance found in CW, it is my opinion that CW has much better hymn balance. For example, in CW, there are 16 hymns for the Epiphany season, while there are only seven hymns for the New Year, and seven hymns for Ascension. The Death and Burial section was reduced from 18 hymns in TLH to four hymns in CW.

The second area in improving the hymns had to deal with choosing which hymns were to be included in the new hymnal. In the survey taken at the 1982 district conventions, 76% of the delegates felt that there was a need to add new hymns to the hymnal. (EN #13). Pastor Eggert also acknowledges, "Many excellent hymns not in our present hymnal should be made available for our worship. Some of these are old. Others are the product of the new interest in hymn writing during the last 20 years or

so. These are **not** missed only because they are not known. And they are not known, because they are not in our hymnal" (EN #14).

One of the most difficult things the JHC had to do was to choose which hymns should be kept from TLH, which hymns should be dropped from TLH, and which new hymns should be added to the new hymnal. The JHC reviewed and rated over 1200 hymns from various sources. To help the JHC choose which hymns were to be kept and which hymns were to be dropped, Pastor Kuschel reports that the Commission on Worship requested that ~~Pastor's~~ throughout the Synod note all thy hymns used in their congregations for the course of one year on a survey form. The results from this survey gave the JHC a clear indication of which TLH hymns were widely used and which were not. Thus, many of the hymns that were simply not being used were replaced by new hymns (EN #15).

However, Pastor Eggert points out that choosing hymns involved more than simply running a popularity contest, "Hymn selection for a new hymnal, however, is not as easy as simply running a popularity poll to find out the favorite hymns...Other factors need to be considered. Chief among them are: 1) Spiritual Content 2) Literary and Musical Quality 3) Need" (EN #16). The JHC felt that it was very important to choose hymns which conform to the truths of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. **The** JHC also felt that it was important to choose hymns that were "singable," namely, that they could be learned with reasonable effort.

However, there were some exceptions to these general guidelines, ~~though~~. Some hymns that were used very little and some hymns that are difficult to sing were still included in CW. Pastor Eggert explains: "Among the list of little-used hymns are some of Martin Luther's own hymns; most of these will be retained. They are historically important as heritage hymns of Lutheranism. They are also eminently deserving of study and use." Pastor Eggert also continues by explaining that hymns are not only used in worship services on Sunday morning, but that they are "important

to our schools both for study and worship and for use at conferences, conventions, study groups, festival services, and the like...So, some hymns will be retained even though everybody can't or won't sing them. That's one reason we have 600 hymns in the hymnal...we don't all like or sing the same hymns, and with 600 hymns in the hymnal, we don't need to!" (EN #17).

Despite these guidelines, there were still gray areas when it came to judging hymns. The fact is that tastes differ. What one person might regard as a beautiful hymn, another might think it is a terrible hymn and should never be included in a Lutheran hymnal. So this is where the difficulty came in selecting which hymns should be included in the new hymnal and which should not be included.

In the end, 623 hymns are in CW. About 2/3 of the hymns in CW are from TLH. Pastor Kuschel said that the JHC members are confident that "many of the new hymns selected in the new hymnal will eventually and perhaps even quickly become 'old favorites,' while many, if not all of the 'dropped hymns,' may scarcely be missed." (EN #18).

First of all, I am glad that some newer hymns were included in CW. Some have already become favorites of mine as the JHC members predicted. I am also glad to see that other popular hymns which were not in TLH were included in CW, such as Amazing Grace, Go Tell it on the Mountain, Angels We Have Heard on High.

But I do not agree with every hymn that was chosen for inclusion. There are hymns in CW which I feel are not very "singable." I think that it would take more than a "reasonable effort" to learn them. However, Pastor Eggert made several good points when he said that some hymns were included, even if they were not very "singable," because they have historical value and/or are valuable for study. He also mentioned that others may enjoy the hymns I do not care for, and pointed out that with over 600 hymns in the hymnal, all of us don't have to like and sing the same hymns.

A third area which needed some improvement was the liturgical section of TLH.

In the survey taken at the 1982 district conventions, 57% of the delegates felt that for greater variety, a new hymnal should have more orders of worship (or liturgies). In addition, 75% of the delegates felt that new prayers should be included in a new hymnal. (EN #19).

Thus, several changes were made in the liturgical section of the hymnal. Instead of having two separate liturgies, one for non-communion Sundays, and one for communion Sundays, as found on pages 5 and 15 in TLH, CW makes things a little simpler, by having one service, "*The Common Service*." "*The Common Service*" accommodates both communion and non-communion use.

There were a few other changes made in "*The Common Service*." The placement of the **Kyrie (Lord have mercy)**, was changed. In TLH, it was after the Absolution and after the Collect (Prayer of the Day). However, Pastor Eggert points out that, "In the revised service, the **Kyrie** is sung between the Confession of Sins and the Absolution or declaration of forgiveness. Anciently used as the people's response to pastoral petitions for the Lord's mercy and help in various physical and spiritual needs, the **Kyrie** in the minds of most worshipers today is a penitential plea for forgiveness. It is so used in the revised liturgy." (EN #20).

In TLH liturgy, there were spots for the reading of only two lessons, namely an Epistle lesson and the Gospel lesson. In CW, there are three lessons. The first is usually (but not always) an Old Testament lesson. The second reading is an Epistle lesson. The **third** reading is the Gospel lesson. The **Gradual** in TLH, was replaced by the **Verse of the Day** in CW. The **Verse of the Day** introduces the Gospel lesson.

Besides the three readings, included in CW is a spot for the **Psalm of the Day**. Pastor Eggert describes the psalms as "treasures of the Old Testament hymnbook and prayerbook," and said that room was made for them to be used in the Sunday service so that these treasures don't become lost for today's Christians (EN

#21). He also said that the **Psalm of the Day** was added to “encourage a larger use of the matchless prayer and praise of the ‘hymnbook of the Old Testament.’ The Psalm reflects the mood or central thought of the day or season of the church year (EN #22).

Not only were the psalms added to the liturgy, but they are also designed to be sung, rather than spoken. Some were not real thrilled with the idea of singing the psalms and felt that singing the psalms was a Catholic thing and should not be done in our Lutheran churches. Prof. John Brug responded to such a question. In responding to the question, “Why do we have to return to Catholicism where the minister chants the psalm?” Prof. Brug, answered:

Chanting psalms did not originate with Catholicism but with David who wrote the psalms to be sung in public worship. If you look at the headings on the psalms in your Bible, you will see that many contain musical directions. These “prayers from a book” are God’s own words, given through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What better songs could we sing in our services than songs from God’s own book...Chanting the psalms is simply returning to their original use as described in Scripture. Even if the practice had originated in Catholicism, that would not in itself be reason for us to reject it. We should judge customs on their own merits, just as Luther did at the time of the Reformation. (EN #23).

Prof. Tiefel also argues, “So what if it’s Catholic?” He further points out that we use many Catholic forms. He notes that “some of our favorite hymns were born in Catholicism, e.g. On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry. (EN #24).

Besides the Page 5/15 liturgies in TLH, there was also “*The Order of Matins*” and “*The Order of Vespers*.” Both of these liturgies are included in CW with some minor revisions. The “*Order of Matins*” is now known as “*Morning Praise*,” while “*The Order of Vespers*” is now known as “*Evening Prayer*.” One new feature in both of these services is that the minister chants much of the liturgy.

Besides “*The Common Service*,” “*Morning Praise*,” and “*Evening Prayer*,” two new liturgies have been included in CW. They are the “*Service of the Word*” and the “*Service of Word and Sacrament*.” These liturgies were added to provide some of the variety that was sought by many congregations and individuals.

There are also three other very brief liturgies in CW, which are designed for use in schools, conferences, and congregational organizations/meetings. They are "General Devotion," "Morning Devotion," and "Evening Devotion." Also included in CW is an order of service for "Private Confession," which replaces "The Order of the Confessional Service," found on pages 46-48 in TLH. Also incorporated into CW, which were not in TLH, are order^s of service^s for the rite of Baptism, Christian Marriage, and Christian Funeral. There are also several responsive prayers of the church in CW, which were not in TLH.

I felt that the changes that were made in the liturgy were not very drastic. Much of what was in TLH has been retained with slight revisions and should be easily recognized and be familiar to most. "The Common Service" is very similar to the page 5/15 liturgies found in TLH. "Morning Praise" is very similar to "The Order of Matins," (of TLH) and "Evening Prayer" is very similar to "The Order of Vespers." (of TLH). I am very pleased that several new features were added to the liturgy. The additional orders of service and devotions allow for variety. God-willing as a future pastor, the responsive prayers of the church, the rites for Baptism, Christian Marriage, and Christian Funeral, will also be of great help to me.

Next to the Bible, the hymnal is probably the most important book a Christian has. It is a precious book, as it is not only used to aid our worship life, but it also can be used as a resource for personal devotion. It's hymns remind us of God's love and forgiveness that he gives to us. It's prayers also aid us in going to God in prayer, asking him to help us and bless us. For over 50 years, TLH was the hymnal that people used for worship and as a source for personal devotion. It was a hymnal that they grew to love and cherish. It is my prayer that CW can also serve us in this same way for another 50 years. I pray that many people will also grow to love and cherish CW.

END NOTES

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